

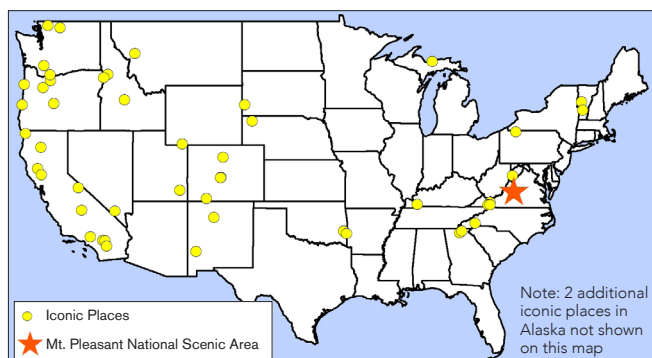


ICONIC PLACES OF THE US FOREST SERVICE

MT. PLEASANT NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

FACT SHEET 18 • SUMMER 2019

The U.S. Forest Service manages specially-designated areas and national monuments, protected either by Congressional legislation or by the President via proclamation under the authority of the Antiquities Act. These areas have been designated for their special characteristics and the unique opportunities they offer. They were protected in perpetuity for a range of ecological and social benefits such as scenic beauty, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. The intent and management objectives for each are distinct and unique. This fact sheet provides an overview of the Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area, based on interviews with USFS personnel and partnership organizations that work together to manage the area.



Mt. Pleasant NSA at a glance

Designation: August 26, 1994 by Public Law 103-314

State: Virginia

Nearest Major City: Lynchburg, VA

Population within 25 miles: 232,076

Population within 100 miles: 3,494,529

USFS Region: 8—Southern

Part of a national forest: Yes, George Washington National Forest

Total acres: 7,580 acres: 6,864 USFS and 716 non-USFS acres

Reasons designated: Scenic values; unique recreation opportunities; history

BACKGROUND

The push behind the Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area (NSA) designation came from wilderness advocates in Virginia. While the advocacy groups wanted stricter protection under a wilderness designation, other user groups were concerned with access being closed off if it became wilderness. The local hunting community, in particular, were concerned about maintaining access, as hunting is a traditional use of the area. The congressional representatives at the time compromised with protection as a national scenic area.

Mt. Pleasant was designated a National Scenic Area by Congress on August 26, 1994. It was named after the 4,070' peak located within its boundaries. The scenic area maintains 60 acres of open, historically agricultural fields that provide an open panoramic vista. Around 110 miles of the Appalachian Trail run through the NSA.

MANAGEMENT

Mount Pleasant is managed as a special area of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. The site falls under the purview of the forest's recreation program manager. There are sometimes overlapping management efforts on both the forest and the scenic area, but there are no dedicated staff for the area. One Forest Service staff explained, "It's monitoring and managing as you go."

Both the Appalachian Trail and the Mount Pleasant NSA have independent management plans that are complementary. Management generally falls into a few primary cate-



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

gories: trail maintenance, dispersed recreation, and the scenic values. The historically open panoramic vista area is maintained with prescribed fire in the late spring, prior to the hiking season on the Appalachian Trail. Forest Service management staff work with Appalachian Trail partners and staff biologists to assess the best management strategies for the open area to maintain its recreation, scenic, and ecological values. Multiple volunteer groups and organizations play a strong role in maintaining trails and monitoring usage across the NSA.

While management of the NSA has not changed much since designation, it has evolved. For example, management of the open panoramic area has evolved to include management considerations for the golden-winged warbler, a bird historically known to be present in the area. In the fall of 2016, a large wildfire occurred and required suppression efforts, introducing a more recent phenomenon of coordinated wildfire management in the NSA.

RECREATION

The Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area is a very popular recreation area, with Forest Service staff estimating that visitor use has doubled over the last 15 years. The majority of visitors come from nearby urban areas. It is a popular destination for local scouting groups, college outdoor programs, weekend adventurers, and hunters. It has also become increasingly popular for mountain biking, stargazing, and a long-distance endurance race that has been permitted in the area for the last 35 years. The main tourists to the area come on the Appalachian Trail, which draws thousands of hikers through the area each season.

CHALLENGES

The greatest challenge for the Mt Pleasant NSA is managing the increased use that the area has experienced in recent years. Increasing vehicular use, in particular, has created the largest challenges for the NSA, both with road maintenance and with resource damage from off-road parking. For example, during one weekend in Fall 2017, management staff counted 70 vehicles in a parking lot built to accommodate 10 vehicles. Maintenance of the access road into the area is also expensive, and funding levels for road maintenance have not kept up with the increase in vehicular traffic.

Increased use has led to an increase in camping in unauthorized areas, and additional efforts to remove fire rings and other impacts from these activities have been needed. Staff and volunteers continually monitor trail systems in the area to understand where the most visitor use is and where the greatest resource needs are concentrated. Both management staff and volunteer organizations agree that addressing capacity for resource sustainability will continue to be the biggest challenge facing the area in the near future.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partners play a critical role in maintaining resources and assisting in the sustainability of the Mt. Pleasant NSA. Trail maintenance, in particular, is often led by volunteers and partner organizations that provide critical experience, knowledge, and labor. The Appalachian Trail Club, through the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, has been a long-standing and consistent partner in the area that provides volunteers to maintain side trails beyond the Appalachian Trail, including everything in the Mt. Pleasant NSA. One Forest Service staff explained that trails in the area “would not be maintained to the level they are without them.” Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS), The Nature Conservancy, and AmeriCorps also provide volunteer and trail work resources. One Forest Service staff reported that in general, volunteer networks for the NSA have been expanding, and that the sustainability of the area over the next ten years was generally positive mainly because of the ongoing involvement with partners.

LESSONS LEARNED

One agency staff described how managers are still learning the best ways to manage the NSA. As recreation use has increased, management of dispersed recreation resources and trails in the area has had to adapt. More recent efforts to restore golden-winged warbler habitat have also helped show how the area can be managed for specific species. Wildland fire at the NSA has also been an area of recent learning. Although prescribed fire has been used for over a decade to maintain the open panoramic vista area, the 2016 wildfire provided an opportunity to see how prescribed fire can also influence wildfire impacts.



LEARN MORE

For more information about the project and additional publications go to:

ewp.uoregon.edu/IconicPlaces

Contact: autumne@uoregon.edu

Authors: James Miller and Autumn Ellison. We thank the interviewees who offered their time and perspectives for this research. This research and fact sheet is funded with a US Forest Service Agreement (#14-CS11132422-323). Photo credit: US Forest Service Southern Region, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests album (https://www.flickr.com/photos/forest_service_southern_region/albums/72157651591919220).